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ABSTRACT

This guide describes intergenerational programs and provides ideas for initiating and implementing informal and formal interaction between youth and senior adults. Intergenerational programs can help dispel negative stereotypes that youth and older adults may have about each other. Successful programs provide rewarding experiences for both generations and opportunities for sharing skills, knowledge, experience, and promoting friendships between youth and older adults. In addition, gaps in the service network of private and public social agencies can be identified and filled through intergenerational volunteers. This guide discusses a program development process that addresses the following topics: (1) identification of top priority community needs and resources; (2) identification of a program sponsor and mobilization of volunteer resources; (3) forming a planning and advisory committee; (4) developing a plan for the program sponsor; (5) operational considerations; (6) types of projects (youth initiated, older-person initiated, and joint youth and older-person initiated; (7) project evaluation; and (8) recommendations for planning effective intergenerational programs. Also provided are suggestions for working with senior adults and involving minorities in developing programs for the elderly. A 25-item bibliography on intergenerational relations is included. (LP)

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# Intergenerational Relations: Older Adults and Youth

*county extension program guide*

by

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# A Message to the County Extension Agent

## Dear Colleague:

Have you been searching for a way to reach senior adults? If so, this program guide may be just what you need. It has many ideas for local intergenerational programs.

"Intergenerational relations" refers to formal or informal interaction between young people and senior adults. Three types of activities are considered:

1. Youth-initiated — youth visit homes or long-term care institutions.
2. Older person-initiated — seniors serve as grandparents or foster grandparents.
3. Cooperative projects — seniors and youth work together on oral and/or pictorial histories, recreational outings, or community service projects.

Intergenerational programs benefit senior adults and youth in the following ways:

**For seniors**

- higher self esteem,
- new friends and social contacts,
- restored confidence,
- shared skills, and talents, and
- a chance to exchange affection.

**For youth**

- broader view of life and aging,
- sense of responsibility,
- acceptance of differences
- meaningful relationships with someone special, and
- interaction with positive adult role models.

Intergenerational program opportunities abound in most rural communities, and they attract a wide range of religious, educational, and civic groups. Most communities consider senior adults and youth as their most valued possessions, but often they are not sure how to make the most of these resources.

Intergenerational projects may be sponsored by Cooperative Extension or managed jointly with community groups. Or extension agents may help schools, churches, or civic clubs with specificprojects.

This program development guide provides ideas and "working tools" for initiating activities in your county. As a professional adult educator who is familiar with the economic, social, and cultural values, and institutions in

your county, you are the best person to decide which ideas or "working tools" are appropriate.

If you launch or expand an intergenerational project, and use materials from this guide, please complete and mail the post-card report form. We plan to share the results of your work with others and to use them for occasional reports to the Kellogg Foundation.

Please contact us if you have questions or desire additional information.

Sincerely,

*Leo L. Cram Ph.D.*

*Director*
*Program Guide Project*

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# Intergenerational Programming

## Introduction

Intergenerational relations refers to any informal interaction between youth and senior adults.

Intergenerational programming (senior adults and youth interacting) is not a new concept. Intergenerational relations have transmitted culture, knowledge, skills, community history and family anecdotes from generation to generation throughout the world's history. Within this context, the grandparent-grandchild relationship has been special. In many countries, where generations continue to live in close proximity, this intergenerational bond remains strong.

The bond is weaker in more developed countries, such as the United States. With the seeming weakening of family structure, some youth are affected by negative stereotypes of older people. They and their parents often live great distances from older relatives. They communicate by telephone rather than by letters. Opportunities to visit members of older generations, to see family letters and memorabilia (tangible links to ancestors) are disappearing.

## Mobility

Grandparent-grandchild familiarity is also undermined by family mobility and multiple marriages. These factors deprive both youth and older people of frequent opportunities to mingle. Yet most of today's seniors are the first to enter their retirement years with good health and an extended life expectancy. They are also a generation accustomed to contributing major amounts of time to volunteer service, a custom dwindling in the middle generation between seniors and youth because both parents work.

In the absence of the traditional nuclear family, community leaders can intervene and play the role of the middle generation by encouraging interaction between the young and the old.

"On the Island of Madeira, there is a beautiful plant botanically named Brunfelsia, but the natives call it Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. When the blossoms open, they are deep purple; as they age they become lavender, and later white. There are three colors on one plant, as we have the young, the middle-aged and the old in one family and in society. Each color is beautiful by itself, but in combination, they contribute to the beauty of each other. So it could be, and often is, for the generations." (JC Penney Forum, Jan '83)

Intergenerational programs can take full advantage of this concept; youth learn from or help the elderly; the middle generation is facilitator or director; and the senior adults serve as teachers or receivers of services. They are interdependent and all are needed to plan and administer a project. Back-and-forth flow makes all three generations enjoy intergenerational programs.

## "Payoffs" from intergenerational programs

First, intergenerational programs can strengthen the social fabric of the community by — dispelling negative stereotypes that youth and older adults may have about each other, — providing opportunities for sharing skills, knowledge and experience across the generations, and — promoting friendships between young and old.

Successful intergenerational programs provide rewarding experiences for both generations. Youth have an opportunity to see what it's like to be old. Older people gain insight into the lives, value systems, and problems of youth. The senior generation creates new relationships, often at a time when they are losing relatives, friends, or

physical capabilities. They remain active and use their time and energy in activities. Secondly, intergenerational programs create opportunities for the community to mobilize volunteer resources. Intergenerational programs draw out young and old community members who may be inactive or ignored. These programs can also link parts of the community service system by promoting cooperation among service providers of all age groups.

Thirdly, intergenerational programs allow both youth and senior adults to benefit personally. Senior adults create new friends and social contacts; receive new incentives to remain active in the community; restore confidence in themselves; and enhance their self esteem. Youth broaden their understanding of life and the aging process in particular; gain a sense of responsibility; and learn to accept differences among people.

Intergenerational programs allow communities to pool resources and effectively use programs for young and old by building a strong volunteer spirit. Gaps in the service network of private and public social agencies can be identified and filled through intergenerational volunteers.

Examples of ways senior adult talents can be used and integrated into youth organizations are illustrated in Table 1 (see the following page).

**Types of older people who participate in intergenerational programs**

Two types of older people are attracted to intergenerational programs. The first are those who love to volunteer; following retirement they increase their volunteer activity. "Volunteerism" is part of their lifestyle and a source of enjoyment, personal fulfillment, and gratification.

The second group, at retirement, wants time for individual pursuits, but after six months or a year they ask themselves, "Is that all there is?" That is when they enter the world of volunteerism.

## Getting Started: A Program Development Process

### Identification of top priority community needs and resources

Confer with community leaders and organization and agency representatives to identify potential community needs that could be satisfied through an intergenerational program. Examples:

1. Identify senior members of Extension Homemaker Clubs who may be interested in sharing their knowledge, skills and personal philosophies with young people.
2. Query public school officials about the potential need for more resources in education (i.e. visiting lecturers in classroom, individual tutors, people to serve as a friend, confidant and pal to a latchkey or self-care kid).
3. Recruit youth to visit homes or to do light chores for frail, homebound elderly.
4. Determine if the local nursing home or long-term care center wants more interaction for their residents.
5. Identify local churches that may be looking for ways to channel their older church members into productive volunteer community improvement projects.
6. Check with local 4-H leaders to determine their interest in expanding the learning experiences for their youth. Does the 4-H youth program need additional adult volunteer leaders or project supervisors?
7. Locate local social service agencies that need volunteers to serve both their young and older program clients. Do delinquent youth need role models? Do isolated homebound elderly clients need a friendly visitor; would adult day care participants enjoy interacting with youth? Do older people need help with house repairs, or could they benefit from occasional chore services?

### Identify a program sponsor and mobilize volunteer resources

Recruit individuals from a cross section of the community to serve on an ad hoc task force to explore community interest in an intergenerational program.
If the ad hoc group identifies some needs, they should share ideas with appropriate volunteer groups and agency and organization representatives; explain the benefits of the program; and together determine if there is sufficient interest to recruit a program sponsor and organize an intergenerational program committee to direct the project.

**Table 1**
Matrix For Matching Senior Adult Talents to a Community Need and Integrating the Intergenerational Program Into An Organization

| Needs identified by a community organization | Potential senior volunteer resources that can be used | Introduction into a youth organization |
|---|---|---|
| Community youth need to develop interview skills | Some senior adults have mastered special skills in storytelling, news reporting, and news writing | Integration into an elementary school social studies project or creation of a special 4-H project focusing on oral history |
| Community youth should develop additional skills for heritage art | Some senior volunteers are accomplished quilt makers, whittlers, or seamstresses, etc. | Integration of the subject matter into a public school course related to the designated craft or creation of a special 4-H project on quilt making, wood whittling or sewing, etc. |
| Youth should obtain more information about their family histories through a heritage book, or family scrapbook | An older family member has extensive family knowledge | Integration of the subject matter into an existing elementary school course or creating a 4-H genealogy project |
| Community youth need more information concerning their local community | An older community resident has extensive knowledge of community records and history | Integration of the subject matter into elementary social studies course or creation of a special 4-H project |
| Senior adults need chore service | 4-H club or Scout troop Teen-ager needing employment | Could be a club volunteer project or a paid service |
| Senior adults in nursing homes need companionship | Organized group church group or school class may adopt | Youth are paired with senoir adults |

For projects connected with Cooperative Extension programs, the county extension council could become the sponsor. In cases where county extension programs reinforce community improvement activities, the sponsoring agency could be a local school system, a service club, a senior citizen organization, local church group, or a unit of city or county government.

**Organizations and agencies with potential roles in intergenerational projects**

| Senior Groups | Middle Group | Youth Groups |
|---|---|---|
| • senior service center | • church volunteers | • college and universities |
| • local nursing home | • university extension staff and volunteers | • Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts |
| • area agency on aging | • American Red Cross | • 4-H clubs |
| • county council on aging | • United Way | • church groups |
| • American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) | • city and county government | • school groups |
| • church volunteers | • men's and women's civic clubs | |
| • retired teachers association | • service organizations (Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, chamber of commerce) | |
| • adult day care programs | • human service agencies | |
| • Action-RSVP | | |
| • Score | | |
| • residents of retired housing complexes | | |
| • Homemaker Clubs | | |

For intergenerational projects where the county extension council will be the supporting agency, the program development committee should include senior volunteers, influential community leaders, county extension staff (including county agricultural agents, county home economists, and/or county 4-H agents). If the intergenerational program is integrated into a 4-H project, both community adult and youth 4-H leaders should be on the volunteer committee.

Three major groups have roles in intergenerational programs — seniors, a middle group to represent interests of both seniors and youth, and youth. All three are important in planning and carrying out a project. Selected people from each group can form a committee. Identify those who have the interest and skills to plan, organize and possibly support the committee.

## Form planning and advisory committee

Form an intergenerational project planning and advisory committee comprised of representatives from the three groups mentioned above. Representatives should be appointed by their respective organizations, and they should have authority to speak for their groups. Explain this concept at the organizational meeting.

All committee members should learn the project's potential benefits to the community. The primary benefits of a broadly-based planning committee are:

1. Draw together a varied group that has the resources to be a part of an intergenerational committee.
2. Identify agencies, groups or organizations, as well as individuals who might participate.
3. Identify programs that exist; specify program gaps; and recommend potential links among programs.

Suggestions for forming the planning committee:

1. Select people interested in the program and with perseverance to stick with the project until it is underway.
2. Obtain support from decision makers in the cooperating organizations and agencies. Invite your own agency's leaders to committee activities. Invite them to serve on the committee, keep them informed.
3. Elect a chairperson with clout; a well-known person who is respected in the community and who is goal oriented.
4. Start small — first attempts are important and help insure continuation of the project.

5. Select volunteers carefully to find competent, interested people who are willing to serve on subcommittees and take on specific activities. Subcommittees are critical to the committee's effectiveness.
6. Keep accurate records and complete minutes of all meetings. These records will allow program leaders and volunteers to keep the program on track. They will be valuable references for others who want to duplicate the program.

In seeking volunteers, use the media, word of mouth, recommendations from extension volunteers, and contacts with organizations and agencies.

Specifically, senior volunteers can be found among:

1. Cooperative Extension volunteers — older members of extension home demonstration clubs; grandparents and great grandparents of 4-H club members; parents and grandparents of cooperating farm families and county extension council members.
2. Senior adult community service centers, nutrition sites, and Meals on Wheels recipients.
3. Local clubs — garden clubs, civic groups, arts and crafts organizations, and League of Women Voters.
4. Churches.
5. Public schools — grandparents and great grandparents of public school children.
6. Libraries — library staff and older "friends of the library."
7. Local chapters of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP); National Retired Teachers Association (NRTA); National Association of Retired Federal Employees (NARFE); Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP); or other associations of retired persons.
8. Senior citizen housing complexes and retirement villages.
9. Personal contacts through family, friends and neighbors.

The following principles are important in working with the senior volunteers:

1. Prepare a complete job description for every category of volunteer needed (tasks to be performed; who the volunteer reports to; hours required; length of commitment expected; location(s) where the volunteer will work; and qualifications and skills).
2. Use a written application form on which the applicant summarizes past work and volunteer experiences.
3. Ask several people to interview the volunteer (some volunteers may not relate well to youth; however, they may fit beautifully into program support functions — secretarial, liaison to public schools; coordination of senior visits to classroom).
4. Provide orientation and in-service training for all senior volunteers.
5. Supervise all volunteers.

## Develop a plan for the program sponsor

The sponsor should establish a specific plan for implementing the intergenerational program. Elements of the plan:

1. Stated goals.
2. Measurable objectives.
3. Timetable of deadlines for tasks and program achievements.
4. An evaluation plan to measure the extent to which project goals are achieved.
5. Plans for sharing results of the project with the community.

## Operational considerations

Intergenerational program developments should be reported. Place news articles in local print media, post notices at public locations, report at community group meetings, provide public service announcements for radio and television media, and write and circulate brochures, fact sheets and newsletters throughout the community. Recognition events for important program participants and community leaders are good sources of publicity.

Finances are important and may vary. The sponsoring organization should start with a small and manageable project. Seed money might come from local service clubs and private or public organizations. Other organizations and agencies might pay directly for

materials or transportation. Volunteers can also be recruited to provide in-kind services to project officials and program clients.

## Types of Intergenerational Projects

Three major types of intergenerational projects:

1. Youth initiated projects — youth provide direct services to older people. Examples are youth visiting nursing homes, doing chores for frail home-bound elderly, or performing aging-related community service.
2. Older person initiated projects — senior adults tutor, care for children, or become foster grandparents (or transmit family histories and skills while creating culturally related foods and art products).
3. Joint youth and older person initiated projects — youth and older people collaborate on intergenerational activities such as arts and crafts festivals, community gardens, drama productions, or community choral groups.

Following are examples of programs in each of the three categories. The descriptions illustrate the diversity of activities and the variety of relationships that can be incorporated into the program content.

## Youth initiated projects

**"Adopt a Grandparent"**

This project provides opportunity for young persons to have personal relationships with senior adults (actual or adopted grandparent). The many subjects and ideas for developing relationships spark other ideas from the youths and grandparents.

Examples include (1) youth asks the senior to describe past experiences such as life during the depression or World War II, (2) a visit to a museum where the grandparent explains about items on display, or (3) the young person and the grandparent share information concerning hobbies, pet care, or cooking.

Appendix B contains a project plan for a 4-H "Adopt a Grandparent" project produced by the University of Arkansas.

## Older-Person Initiated Projects

**"Seniors and Youth: Learning and Sharing"**

Seniors and youth learning and sharing is designed to help 4-H, day care, scout groups, and public schools take advantage of the skills and knowledge of senior adults. A grandparent-grandchild relationship is very special. However, it sometimes needs support when all family members are busy and do not have time for grandparents. It is important to know older people. Senior volunteers have the interest, capability, and initiative to fill this void.

Although this program was designed to serve youth, it is difficult to determine which group benefits most. Teachers extoll the skills and cultural knowledge gained by the youth. Teachers also enjoyed the opportunity to interact with older people who enjoy life. The seniors learned they were valued and needed.

Appendix C contains a project plan for a "Seniors and Youth" project provided by Iowa State University and the National Center of Extension Gerontology.

## Joint youth and older-person initiated projects

**"Stepping Into the Past: Personal Development"** — This program brings young people and older adults together to share their experiences related to some prearranged topics. Sample topics include rural life education and schooling; family times; places and events; important people; daily chores; school or 4-H experiences and holidays.

A major portion of the project involves frequent visits (at least ten) between the young person and the older adult. During each visit, they talk about one of the topics, and choose activities to expand and enrich the learning. Young people acquire a positive image of older adults and greater self confidence. Older adults take pride in their important role as educators and find personal satisfaction in strengthening their relationships with the younger generation.

The results of the project are assembled in a "grandscrapbook"; "grandstory" record book; or a heritage scrapbook.

Appendix D contains a project plan for "Stepping Into The Past": Personal Development, produced by Oklahoma State University.

"Those Rich in Experience" — This project provides opportunity for young people to expand their knowledge of the aging process; review roles of older people in society; and become familiar with the dynamics of intergenerational relationships. This process frequently results in positive attitudes and perceptions of youth about older members of society.

The project provides a series of brief learning vignettes that expose youth to facts about the aging process. Youth are encouraged to answer specific questions.

The learning vignettes focus on such topics as — Discover Your Attitudes and Perceptions; — The Later Years: thinking, discussing, planning and doing; — Planning for Retirement; — Nursing Homes: Friend or Foe? — Positive Action is Love Made Visible; and — Thoughts for the Later Years.

Appendix E contains a project plan for "Those Rich in Experience" produced by the University of Kentucky.

"Grandletters" — This is a correspondence program for grandparents and their grandchildren.

Letters are satisfying and can be reread and kept. Such correspondence needs a plan or structure. A grandletters project can provide this structure and support learning. Topics for the letters may be — affection and friendship, — generosity and love, — respect for elders, — helpfulness, — conflict and violence, — family and heritage, — responsibility and courage, — honesty and commitment, — competition and justice, and — sadness and grief.

Appendix F contains a project plan for "Grandletters: a correspondence program for grandparents and their grandchildren" produced by Kansas State University.

## Other Ideas for joint youth and older-person initiated projects

Additional ideas for organizing joint youth and older person programs include:

- Home surveys to identify possible safety hazards.
- Inspection for highway and public hazards.
- A community education series on securing the home against crime.
- A neighborhood watch patrol similar to the school crossing guard program.
- A vial of life program.
- A home energy check survey.
- A home winterization (develop teams to strip or caulk doors and windows or make minor home repairs).
- A litter pickup or recycling cans campaign.
- A community beautification project (paint; collect trash; plant trees, shrubs and flowers; etc.
- An escort service for mobility-impaired persons.
- A reading program for the visually impaired.

## Evaluation

An evaluation plan will help to measure the effectiveness of the intergenerational program. Data can be gathered in a variety of ways including — written survey instruments, oral interviews or anecdotal reports.

Alternative evaluation techniques:

1. Interviews with older people. Oral interviews yield good information from senior adults.
2. Reports by older people.
3. Youth reaction — thank you letters from youth give delightful anecdotes.
4. Scrapbooks provide evidence of effective intergenerational relationships.
5. A recognition activity provides opportunity for gathering additional information and allows the sponsor to publicly thank the participating senior adults. A recogni-

tion activity also provides opportunities for— youth to develop management skills,— to know and appreciate older people, and— get publicity that may broaden opportunities for expanding the program.

The final report should include sections on:

1. Realization of goals.
2. Description of activities.
3. Number and types of participants.
4. Frequency and duration of intergenerational activities.
5. Impact of the program on the well being of older persons.
6. Impact on attitudes towards children, youth, and older persons.
7. Impact on attitudes toward aging.
8. Ideas for improving the program (perspectives on aging).

## Hints for planning effective intergenerational programs

In launching an intergenerational program, the following suggestions are offered by the experts:

**Selling the Program**

If you are working with public school officials, emphasize that intergenerational programs offer enrichment to the youth.

When conferring with extension 4-H agents, emphasize enrichment; an opportunity for a new and exciting program; and emphasize that an intergenerational project can mobilize new volunteer talent for the 4-H program.

**Organizational Principles**

1. Carefully identify a single specific community need. Start small and build on success.
2. Seek potential resources, including workers, sites, equipment, trainers and all possible sources of financial support.
3. Recruit and screen prospective volunteers and paid workers. Be persistent — recruitment may not be easy at first. Be diligent in screening, and remember that not all older persons work well with children or prove capable of applying the program principles.
4. Train both paid workers and volunteers. Make sure that they understand and can promote the objectives of the project and are comfortable with their responsibilities.
5. Support, supervise and provide materials needed by paid workers and volunteers to perform their jobs.
6. Pay workers adequately, if a paid position, and recognize volunteers' contributions. Praise their work and build self esteem.
7. Evaluate the program, preferably with outside help, and make needed changes without delay.
8. Newspaper photos and stories throughout the project report contributions and build interest.

**Senior adult involvement**

1. Involve seniors in initial planning of the program.
2. Capitalize on the strengths of the seniors.
3. Communicate with seniors frequently so that everyone fully understands the goals and activities of the program.
4. Remember that older people prefer to work close to home; they may have a difficult time viewing themselves as experts; and their schedules are often flexible.
5. Remember that senior adult's long term memories do not decline significantly; they are reliable sources of information on the past.
6. As people age, some are willing to help with a project and engage in the planning, sharing and teaching; others prefer not to be bothered with details or organizing a project.

**Ethnic or cultural variables**

In special cultures such as Native Americans, Spanish-American, Oriental and Black Americans, remember that older people are held in high respect. They bear the responsi-

bility as caretakers of the culture and they transmit this knowledge to the youth. Youth who interact with older people in these cultural settings should remember to show respect and understanding for the older people.

**Training and operational considerations**

1. Do not perpetuate negative stereotypes.
2. Provide elderly with meaningful tasks.
3. Involve the elderly in planning activities.
4. Interview senior volunteers carefully. All do not work well with youth. Take care to find a proper niche for each senior adult in the program.
5. Regularly assess to ensure that seniors are functioning in assigned roles. If they can no longer fill a role, find one where they can satisfactorily make a contribution.

**Youth**

Children who are isolated from the old are less likely to understand normal aging and are more likely to believe stereotypes about the elderly.

**Young and old together**

1. Involve both young and old in planning.
2. Make sure that the program benefits both young and old.
3. Ensure that both young and old can give as well as receive.
4. Encourage one-to-one exchanges to provide opportunities for friendship.

## Select first intergenerational project carefully

If you launch an intergenerational project, select one that focuses on involving of healthy and active older adults (senior service centers or senior center group housing complexes). This will help ensure a positive impact on youth. If you want to expand your intergenerational program to include older and frail elderly, visit nursing homes and long-term care centers before doing so.

**Working style**

1. Don't try to do it all yourself. Draw on community resources in planning and operating programs. Form working relationships between youth and senior organizations. Share resources.
2. Young people have ambition, energy and enthusiasm. Seniors have experience, knowledge, and expertise. If you can put these things together, you have dynamite — anything can happen!
3. Enjoy yourself! Intergenerational programs are fun!

**4-H record book and/or diary**

A record book or diary is recommended for recording and reporting activities and outcomes from intergenerational projects. It should be flexible and tailored to the 4-H club member's personality and style. Each 4-H club member is encouraged to use their creativity in fashioning a scrapbook which records and documents the most significant program activities.

## Subject matter

Suggestions for constructing a record book or diary:

1. Prepare a written record of the interchanges with older people. This may include written summaries of conversations; observations and verbal exchanges in classes or group meetings taught by seniors; records of experiences or oral histories presented by older people; or written summaries of ideas learned from a group activity involving youth and older persons.
2. Individual and/or group photographs of project participants; photographic records of group activities; older photographs contributed by the senior adult; and other photographic evidence of the project activities.
3. Tape recordings of conversations between the youth and older people.

4. Sample copies of memorabilia, historic records, and related documents that reinforce oral histories, and recollections by older people.
5. Newspaper articles and related printed materials that document program activities.

**Record book or diary construction**[1]

1. Use any loose-leaf scrapbook with a strong, serviceable cover.
2. The scrapbook should be compact, yet complete.
3. Use heavy paper for the pages and write on both sides.
4. Use ink for writing, or type the material.
5. Use glue or paste to secure items, not tape.
6. To conserve space, carefully organize photographs and clippings.
7. Pages in the book should be securely fastened and of uniform size.

[1]Many of suggestions included in this section were taken from Iowa State University Cooperative Extension pamphlet, "So You Are Historian of Your Group," 4-H 71-E, revised October 1982.

Some reminders

# Working with Senior Adults

## Introduction

Senior adults (persons 65 years and older) are one of the fastest growing segments of society, and each succeeding generation is progressively healthier, wealthier, and more highly educated.

Senior adults are a very diverse or heterogeneous group; use caution in generalizing and aggregating them on the basis of personal interests, needs, aspirations, or physical/mental capabilities.

The aging process does, however, affect people in many different ways and at different stages in their lives. The following general aging-related changes should be recognized and compensated for in planning educational workshops for older adults:

| Physical and/or mental changes | How to adapt adult education practices for older adults |
|---|---|
| 1. Body functions slow down and the body loses some of its elasticity. | • Schedule meetings in familiar settings and in barrier-free locations.<br>• Maintain comfortable room heat and proper ventilation.<br>• Use suitable furniture.<br>• Schedule meetings at mid-morning or early afternoon. Avoid evening meetings.<br>• Lectures should not exceed one hour including one break, and allow plenty of time for people to visit the rest room. Do a few simple exercises during the break. |
| 2.Visual and hearing sensitivities are reduced. | • Older adults need more lighting, good room acoustics, and respond more positively when they are seated close to the speaker.<br>• Lecturers should speak progressively slower as the age of the group advances, and they should stand relatively still to allow for lip reading.<br>• Lecturers should study the faces of the group to determine whether they are being heard.<br>• Compensate for reduced hearing with proper visual aids.<br>• Compensate for reduced vision with good sound.<br>• Eliminate background noise. |
| 3. Memory and the rate of information recall are reduced and/or delayed. | • Present subject-matter in a structured, step-by-step, systematic manner.<br>• Present subject-matter in short, manageable units.<br>• Repeat complex subject-matter. Summarize frequently<br>• Use examples that are familiar and relevant.<br>• Use properly designed hand-out materials.<br>• Advertise the learning experience as "workshop," "meeting," or "group participation." Avoid "class" or "education." |

4. Formal education may be viewed with anxiety.

- Structure a variety of learning opportunities, offer choices, provide opportunities for reveal ing talents, and create productive experiences that offer social interaction.
- Praise good work; accentuate the positive.
- Describe older people in positive terms such as "senior adults," "seniors," "senior citizens," or "older adults." Avoid negative terms such as "aged," "elderly," or "old folks."

## Disseminating information through print

**Color Configuration:**

- Black print on white background is best (color on color is not good).
- Older adults often see reds, oranges, and yellows better than blues, greens, and purples.
- Shiny paper reduces the contrast. Enlarged and poor quality print often has "muddy" edges and poor contrast.
- Yellow has a high velocity and enhances visibility.

**Print Size and Style:**

- Older readers prefer large type.
- Smaller type with an additional point or two of spacing between lines creates the desired effect, conserves space, and maintains readability.

**Composition and Spacing:**

- Proportional spacing should always be used where the white space between the letters is kept constant, regardless of letter width.
- Indentation of paragraphs and standard capitalization also provide visual clues and improve readability.
- A comfortable line length is from 5 to 6 inches.
- Margins wider than a one-fourth inch have little impact on readability with the exception of a bound publication.
- A straight left margin helps readers fol w the copy.

## A Concluding Thought

A major problem facing most older people is their serious concern about the possibility that they will lose their independence and become a burden to their family, friends, or state and national governments. They fear dependency – be it economic, physical, emotional, mental, social, or familial.

Many older adults say: "We want to be in a position where we can make our own decisions relative to our own lives; we don't want other people to be making these decisions for us. We want to continue to be involved in life; we don't want to be put on the shelf. We want to be treated with dignity."

Extension agents who work with older people should be aware of their concerns, and when possible, provide positive reinforcement, encouragement and assistance. Socialization with peers is a way to encourage independence. Listening can be the first step toward genuine communications.

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Suggestions for

# Involving Minorities in Developing Programs for the Elderly

## Rationale

Sensitivity towards the needs of the elderly should increase as the elderly population grows in number and percent of total.

Services for the elderly have increased but there is a lack of information concerning cultural and socio-economic viewpoints of the elderly, particularly the minority elderly.

Researchers have only touched the surface of the minority elderly conditions. The data consists of clumped together, mundane (over-generalized) observations of all minority aged groups. There is little knowledge of the unique socio-economic, cultural context in which minority elderly persons exist.

A large amount of the research done on the minority elderly has been produced by non-minority practitioners who have not adequately and thoroughly observed the environment and lifestyle of the minority elderly. Thus their opinions and research are oftentimes biased.

There is a need to provide both minority and non-minority practitioners with an understanding of and sensitivity to the needs of minority elderly, and with an understanding of their culture and the structure of their environment. This understanding would enhance the practitioner's ability to communicate and share ideas, skills, and future objectives with the minority elderly.

The practitioner must also be aware of all the outside variables that contribute to the economic and social makeup of the living situation of minority elderly. Therefore, it is necessary to have some guidelines to enable practitioners to begin learning, planning, and practicing relationships with minority elderly.
This set of guidelines provides information for educators and practitioners who will go into minority communities and assist minority elderly persons.

## Needs assessment stage

During needs assessment, make a strong effort to involve minority elderly and their perspective as much as possible. Minority ministers, social service professionals, teachers, and community leaders at the local level or at state and national levels can assist you, but the best input will come from the minority elderly themselves.

Transportation is a big problem for the elderly. Visit with them in their home if they can't come to you, or telephone them. Local churches and social service agencies as well as post office, governmental and school officials can assist in locating elderly minority representatives.

Be patient and listen well to what they have to say. Record their responses, if possible, so that you can digest their reactions. The dialects may be difficult to understand, but, by taping you can review and better understand their assessments of the situations you wish them to address.

Indicate that you want and value their input and that their participation is needed in the program development and assessment processes. Be aware that they will assume their input won't matter much. You must continue to assure them that their perspectives are legitimate and valuable.

**Program development stage**

At the development stage, seek minority representatives who can provide insightful inputs into the total program, not merely the minority portion of it.
Organize this stage in a manner non-threatening to the minority representatives. Save the technical jargon and details for your staff activities, or hold a short seminar to familiarize everyone with the necessary terms and procedures which will be employed during the program development stage. Indicate your appreciation for the minority elderly's participation, encourage others to support the minority elderly at this stage.

Involve minorities in the policy areas as well as the program areas. Let them know they have an ownership stake in the program. Support the right of self-determination by presenting them with options to consider.

**Program operation stage**

At the program operations stage, start by having minority representatives serve as part of the operations as staff, volunteers, and as consumers of the program. The local churches, the media, and governmental agencies can assist in locating and communicating the need and opportunity for minority involvement.

Allow the minority elderly to maintain their personal dignity. Arrange transportation for them to participate in the program. Conduct the program at hours and locations convenient for them. Consider minority dietary habits in your program if meals are provided. Make sure that more than superficial and haphazard services are provided to them.

Try to understand their beliefs, religions, and cultural policies. Inform them of their rights, i.e. Title VI of Civil Right Act.

Ask minority members to recruit other minority members for the program. Urge them to use their influence 'and relationships. Encourage them to help you make the service meaningful to them and other minority members.

Encourage all non-minority members to make minorities feel welcome and secure. Assure the minorities that they will not lose social security or other benefits if they participate in the program.

**Action considerations**

Provide financial compensation and other resources to support these networks (i.e. tax incentives).

Establish guidelines or standards to be applied to these networks that are based on input from and knowledge of the selected community or population served.
Adapt service delivery systems to the structure of the natural networks of the minority aging person rather than insisting that these networks adapt to your service delivery systems.

Require agencies to document knowledge and awareness of systems that help minorities who are located in a given service area.

Provide helpers, e.g. "servidores," with stipends and consultation fees to train staff, students, and others involved in decision making to improve service delivery to minority elders.

Require personnel providing supportive services to demonstrate an ability to work with minority elderly as part of their qualifications.

Collect information and experience from those agencies that have been successful in using minority staff members.

**Program evaluation stage**

During evaluation, allow minority participants to remain anonymous, if they choose to be anonymous.

- Respect their views. Don't assume their views will all be alike.
- Encourage them to participate fully. Explore ways to consider subjective qualities of all aspects of the program.
- Encourage them to clarify what they mean so that you can fully understand and appreciate their contribution. Involve them in better ways of documenting services.
- Generally they may view a context or activity in a somewhat different manner than their non-minority counterparts.

**Involve minorities**

As you think about program expansion, consider the number of staff, consumers, and policy makers who are minority. Consider the programs and policies that address the needs and aspirations of minority rural elderly.

Consider the minority consumer. Obtain a list of friends, relatives, churches, and social agencies that will enable you to maintain contact with them as well as the media.

To maintain contact with the minority elderly, use personal approaches.

- Visit them at home.
- Telephone them if you can't visit them. If they don't have a telephone, find a neighbor who has a telephone who will personally communicate a message for you.
- Use the mail and the media to communicate with them.
- Send stamped, self-addressed envelopes if a response is needed.

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## *Dedicated to*

# *Hess Stella Jones*

of Hayti, Missouri

Hess, a native of West Tennessee received her B.S. degree in Elementary Education from Tennessee State University in 1946. She began her teaching career in the Hayti Missouri School District as an elementary teacher, and retired after 38 years of continued dedicated services.

Hess and her husband W. L. Jones, who is a retired barber, are referred to as the "winning team." This title is given to the Jones' because of their many long hours of community work. They are extremely skilled at working with diversified groups such as extension homemakers, 4-H, church groups, community groups, youth in trouble and isolated families in need.

Hess has received numerous community service awards. Efforts include ABE Programs, adult literacy, counseling troubled youth, and working with isolated families. Hess has a philosophy of work and people that she and her husband live by. A simple statement that was taught to her at a very early age, "If a job is once begun, never stop until it is done, be it great or small, do it well or not at all."

The Jones have two sons, Roy R. Jones and Dwight D. Jones. Both have completed advanced college degrees and are employed outside the area. The young men return home monthly to work with their parents. They also serve as mentors/role models for youth in the area. The Jones exemplify the community spirit and a commitment to serve. It is this legacy that the Jones will pass on to the community.

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